

VZCZCXRO1436

PP RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHROV RUEHSR

DE RUEHRA #0847/01 2901109

ZNY CCCCC ZZH

P 171109Z OCT 06

FM AMEMBASSY RIGA

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3442

INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RIGA 000847

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/17/2016

TAGS: PREL EAID BO GG RU LG

SUBJECT: LATVIAN MFA ON BELARUS AND GEORGIA

REF: A) RIGA 633 B) STATE 171907

Classified By: Ambassador Catherine Todd Bailey. Reason: 1.4 (D)

¶1. (C) Summary: Belarus has dropped the charges against the Latvian diplomat accused in July of distribution of pornography and transferred the evidence to Latvia under the bilateral mutual legal assistance treaty. While this should allow some stabilization in the bilateral relationship, including the likely return of the Latvian Ambassador to Minsk, the entire experience is causing the GOL to reevaluate its relationship with Belarus. It will consider how to best use its nascent assistance program as a policy tool in Belarus, hoping to focus on people to people exchanges. On Georgia, Latvia is concerned by recent Russian actions, but agreed to somewhat softer GAERC language in order to reach consensus. They would like to see NATO SYG de Hoop Scheffer discuss Georgia when he visits Moscow later in the month. In Georgia, Latvia is considering how best to use its development assistance to strengthen government institutions.

End summary

¶2. (U) Pol/econ chief met October 16 with Edgars Skuja, MFA U/S for bilateral affairs to review a number of issues. Skuja was accompanied by Liga Andersone, Office Director equivalent for the FSU.

Belarus

-----

¶3. (C) Pol/econ chief asked about press reports that Belarus had dropped the charges against the Latvian diplomat accused of distributing pornography in July following a sting operation(ref A). Skuja said that the GOB had formally closed its investigation and, under the terms of the Latvia-Belarus Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty, transferred all evidence to the Latvian government on October 12, which in turn has passed it to the Latvian Prosecutor General's Office. Skuja said the Latvian Prosecutor would have a free hand to determine whether any charges would be filed. Skuja met October 12 with the Belarusian Ambassador to Latvia who assured him, on a political level, that the case is closed and they look to move forward on the bilateral relationship.

¶4. (C) The next step will be for Belarusian Ambassador Gerasimenko to have a meeting with Latvian FM Pabriks. Since presenting credentials in July, Gerasimenko has not had any courtesy calls on GOL officials and abruptly departed the country just before the scandal erupted. Skuja thought this meeting could happen as early as October 18. In that meeting, Pabriks would note that Belarus violated the Vienna Convention in Diplomatic Relations, even if only "indirectly or unwittingly" and Gerasimenko will so acknowledge. The GOL will reflect that acknowledgement in a press statement, although the Belarusian side is not expected to make any such direct statement to the press. If that all happens, Pabriks could decide as early as October 19 to allow Latvian Ambassador to Minsk Maira Mora to return to post.

15. (C) More problematic, according to Skuja, are some meetings scheduled for later in October, including the Latvia-Belarus intergovernmental commission (IGC) planned for October 27 and an investment forum in Minsk the following day. Skuja thought the GOL might delay the IGC, citing the recent Latvian elections, and the Belarusians might then delay the investment forum. That was fine, Skuja thought, as the GOL needed an opportunity to rethink its Belarus policy. He thought the GOL was likely to step up its efforts to build people to people contacts between the two countries as a result of this. The one event that should go forward is an October 31 meeting in Riga to sign technical agreements related to the recent demarcation of the border.

16. (C) Reflecting on the lessons learned from the incident and its aftermath, Skuja said that it became clear to the GOL just how much "heavy competition" there is between GOB institutions such as the Ministry of the Interior, MFA, BKGB and the President's office. Throughout the negotiations with Minsk, the GOB was rarely able to speak with one voice. The one person the Latvians found helpful was PM Sidorsky. While acknowledging his lack of ability to bring about real change, Sidorsky was the most open and helpful person in the process, Skuja said.

Georgia

-----

17. (C) Skuja welcomed the discussion in NATO's political committee on Georgia October 13 and said Latvia thought that was a very good consultation. Pol/econ chief, drawing from ref B, stressed the importance of holding such consultations in a timely manner and urged Latvia not to let some nations delay such consultations for their own ends. Skuja agreed, but said Latvia had not been too energized because in

RIGA 00000847 002 OF 002

multiple conversations with Georgian officials the weeks of October 2 and 9 (including Latvian president with Georgian Speaker and the two PM's), the Georgians had not asked for any assistance from the Latvians in getting this raised in NATO or the EU. Skuja added, though, that Latvia thought the NATO SYG de Hoop Scheffer should definitely discuss Georgia on his upcoming visit to Moscow and he would instruct the Latvian mission to NATO to make this point.

18. (C) Skuja said Latvia was pleased with the language likely to emerge from the GAERC on Georgia. While Latvia might have wanted some tougher wording on Russia's actions, at least what was currently on the table reflected that both Georgia and Russia needed to work to deescalate tensions and it strongly supports resolving the separatist conflicts in a way that fully respects Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Skuja said that Latvia will consider ways to use its development assistance in Georgia to strengthen State institutions there.

19. (C) Comment: Latvia has never had illusions about the nature of the Lukashenko regime, but they perhaps thought they might have better luck than others at working with it. The July incident and its aftermath have been eye opening for the GOL, but it is hard to predict exactly what policy will emerge from the interplay of foreign policy goals to promote democracy and economic goals to promote trade and investment.

On Georgia, the Latvians' natural instinct seems to be to take a tough line with Moscow, but that is tempered by the institutional realities of both the EU and NATO, which end up softening the Latvian position. Importantly, in both cases Skuja noted that Latvia's small assistance budget could be a tool, meaning they are beginning to factor this into their policy development. It is a good sign ahead of the October 19 - 20 visit of EUR/ACE coordinator Tom Adams.

BAILEY